



NASW

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TESTIMONY REGARDING HB-5037: AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

Appropriations Committee
February 17, 2022
Submitted By: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 2,300 members, we urge the Appropriations Committee to increase funding for school based mental health services, especially for the employment of additional school social workers. *NASW Standards for School Social Work Services* calls for a ratio of 250 students per one school social worker.

There is crisis in children's mental health that existed prior to the pandemic and made far worse by the pandemic. Community based mental health services in the non-profit, private and state public sector are stretched to the maximum. This leaves too many children and their families unable to acquire much needed help. Even when a parent can find an opening for their child to be seen transportation, life crisis, parental employment, limited internet services and other scheduling obstacles make it too hard for many families to make appointments work. However, children are in school, where they can be successfully reached and helped. The only problem is not all schools have school social workers, or schools share one worker, or the ratio of students to social worker is so high that too many children still go without help. A dramatic expansion of school social work services is both necessary and justifiable.

School social workers can help children learn ways of adapting to stressful situations before maladaptive coping skills are established. It has been shown that children with healthy adaptive coping skills to stress have higher attendance rates, decreased drop-out rates, higher test scores and higher self-esteem. School social workers are the **one discipline in a school system** that proactively addresses academic barriers within the child's home, school and community. School social workers help students through means of prevention, early identification, intervention, counseling and support. School social workers deal with bullying, crisis intervention, drug use, need for counseling, conflict resolution, issues of self-esteem, child neglect and abuse, working to connect students with needed services, and the list goes on. These are services that benefit the student, the student's family, teachers, and administrators.

Focusing on students is a key aspect of school social work practice, however it is just one of several important roles played by school social workers. Social workers are pro-

actively involved in working with parents to enhance parent involvement, assuring families have information and access to community services, and collaborating with outside agencies such as the Department of Children and Families all are part of a school social workers typical day. Teachers and school administrators also benefit, in multiple ways, from having available school social workers as a resource, including helping to explain how family dynamics are affecting academic performance, coordinating services, and assisting in developing individual educational goals and the means to help the student attain those goals. A teacher's ability to teach is enhanced by the school social worker.

Schools do not function in a vacuum. When students cross that school door, in-person or virtually, they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of trauma, fears of being bullied, the effects of the Covid pandemic and in this economy where so many families are struggling to get by those concerns press on the student's mind. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom, be it a physical classroom or virtual classroom. School social workers break through these barriers by providing students with the coping skills and support necessary to allow learning to take place.

The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission and the Keep the Promise Coalition all have endorsed expansion of school social work services to address the mental health needs of school children.

Connecticut can pump increased dollars into classroom learning, but without greatly enhanced mental health services in the schools that money will not have its intended effect.